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				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
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				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
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13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
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**TURKEY'S RISING INFLUENCE AND
INCREASING POLITICAL BOLDNESS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH NATO**

by

Keith A. Henderson

Commander, US Navy

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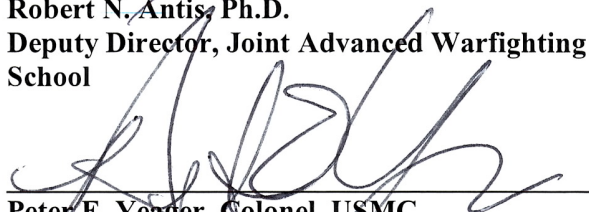
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Abstract

Turkey has historically been a political outlier among its NATO allies. Its political culture has not always been aligned with the values that NATO espouses, and divisions have arisen over Turkey's invasion of Cyprus and the US invasion of Iraq. Despite these differences, Turkey has managed to maintain a strong bond with NATO. But recent actions by Turkey have caused increasing levels of consternation within the alliance. This paper examines the causes of this recent tension, its implications for NATO leaders, and actions that can be taken to ensure the future cohesion of the alliance. The paper looks at Turkey's history, including its accession to the alliance and its historic relationship with NATO. This historic perspective is then contrasted with modern Turkey's identity, which is centered on Turkey's desire to have a more prominent role both within its geographic region as well as within its international organizations. NATO leaders have had difficulty assessing Turkey's intentions when it has asserted itself in alliance matters, and this has created varying degrees of acrimony. Part of this results from the often-rancorous actions and speech of Turkey's President. He has demonstrated that he seeks a more Islamist, authoritarian government. His attempt to mold the government into this vision has created an environment that at times is hostile to the press, members of academia, and political opponents. Finally, the paper examines how Turkey's actions have affected its relationship with NATO. It then identifies areas of mutual interest to both NATO and Turkey, and recommends actions to be taken by both parties to strengthen alliance ties.

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Introduction

Since the creation of the Turkish Republic in the wake of World War I, Turkey has existed in a shifting world that has continually drifted between two dissimilar realities: the secularism, modernity, and relative security of the West, and the historically Islamic influence of a nation that is geographically not quite the Middle East, but not quite Europe. The confluence of these two realities has at times led to a tenuous relationship with Turkey's partners and allies. But a long line of influential leaders that have generally sought to integrate Turkey with its Western allies has served to ameliorate the challenges in its relationships.

Turkey has historically sought to partner with the West in many ways, but the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) serves as the most important institutional link through which Turkey interacts with the West. Turkey is one of the oldest members of NATO, and its membership in the alliance has provided it direct access to the United States and Europe. These relationships have almost exclusively focused on defense issues. The importance of these defense issues has allowed other potential facets of the relationship to be overlooked or neglected.¹

However, recent changes in the behavior of Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, have made it more difficult for NATO to continue to avoid the non-defense related facets of the relationship. His strong movement toward a more Islamic and authoritarian form of government, combined with his aggressive public statements and apparent disregard for

¹ Tarık Oğuzlu, "Testing the Strength of the Turkish-American Strategic Relationship Through NATO: Convergence or Divergence Within the Alliance?" *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* Vol.15, No. 2 (April 2013): 208.

the concerns of his Western allies, has begun to create fractures within Turkey's relationship with the West. President Erdoğan has implemented increasingly Islamic and authoritarian measures to his governance.² This combination of characteristics frequently places him at odds with the leaders of the Western nations with which Turkey seeks to partner. In the past, Turkey and its Western allies avoided potential rifts by focusing on shared values and interests. This was easily accomplished when they shared a common threat. However, recent changes in the security environment in both Europe and Turkey have brought about an increased focus on individual national interests. Although this paper will focus on Turkey's interests relative to the rest of NATO, this more nationalistic focus on security interests has been observed among many other alliance nations, not just with Turkey. It has manifested itself in the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union, Hungary's national vote to refuse admission of Syrian refugees, and various intermittent border closings from Germany to Denmark to Belgium.

Despite what seems to be diverging interests between Erdoğan's administration and NATO leaders, a number of shared interests between the two entities continue to exist. While many of these shared interests remain focused on security, the interests have begun to grow beyond the sphere of military engagement. They increasingly include issues related to trade and economic integration, immigration and border control, national sovereignty, respect for democratic norms, and more. However, questions remain. Are these shared interests enough to salvage Turkey's relationship with NATO? Is Turkey turning from the West? Is Turkey still a viable member of NATO? What can be done to bridge the seemingly widening gap between Turkey and NATO?

² Halil Karaveli, "Erdoğan's Journey," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 6 (November/December 2016): 127.

The thesis of this paper is that NATO and Turkey continue to share enough common interests for both of them to seek ways to salvage what could be a weakening relationship. By focusing on these shared interests, NATO and Turkey can move beyond recent political disputes and continue to build a relationship that enhances security and cooperation between all parties.

This thesis will use a methodology that provides a detailed examination of the identities and behaviors of modern Turkey and NATO, followed by an analysis of these respective identities in the context of their historical relationship. It will begin with a summary of Turkey's history as a nation-state, from its formation to modern-day. Then the paper will examine Turkey's unique military and security situation, particularly as it differentiates Turkey from the rest of NATO. This will include a look at its relationship with neighboring Syria, its view on the Kurdish situation, and its role in the fight against ISIL. Finally, the paper will present an analysis of President Erdoğan's long-term aspirations for the nation of Turkey, and assess their compatibility with NATO's strategic goals and visions.

Chapter One

Origins of the Turkish Nation

Any examination of Turkey's position in today's world order would be incomplete without first reviewing the origins of the modern-day Turkish nation-state. This section of the paper will provide a detailed account of Turkey's emergence from the remnants of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Turkey's status as a so-called "secular Islamic" nation has been well-documented, as has the influence of Atatürk in the formation of the Turkish Republic. This section will not focus on those aspects of Turkey's history. Instead, it will provide a detailed examination of the hurdles overcome by Atatürk and the actions he took to achieve his objectives. This examination will provide a beneficial contrast by which to evaluate the current president's actions.

Mustafa Kemal (later Mustafa Kemal Atatürk) was a well-regarded leader who made a name for himself as a capable military officer during the first world war. As the war came to an end, the Ottoman Empire found itself in ruins. It had been defeated by the Allied powers which humiliated the once proud Ottoman people by carving up their sprawling empire. It was against this backdrop that Atatürk was able to rise to power and lead the Turkish people into a new era. One of Atatürk's first ideas was to jettison the position of the sultan and the caliph, a tradition that dated back over 600 years. In his mind and the minds of many others, the sultan had betrayed the nation through his signing of the Treaty of Sèvres. This treaty, signed in 1920, effectively internationalized Istanbul and the Dardanelles, while also providing for an independent Armenia, an autonomous Kurdistan, and a Greek presence

in Anatolia.¹ The perceived subordination of Turkish national interests to the powers of the West gave Atatürk the credibility to rally the Turkish people in an attempt to form a new government. In 1922, under pressure from Atatürk and his supporters, the sultan fled the nation under British protection. The Turkish Parliament raised a new person to the throne, but vested him with no political authority. In 1923, Parliament negotiated the Treaty of Lausanne to supplant the Treaty of Sèvres. This new treaty granted Turkey full sovereignty over all of its territories and created the political boundaries that exist today.² Shortly after signing this treaty, the Turkish Parliament declared the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.³

The establishment of a republic was an important step that began Turkey's movement towards secularization. In the spring of 1924, Parliament ratified a republican constitution that codified a system of government absent Islamic influence. It did this by, among other things, abolishing the caliph and eliminating the Sharia courts. It passed laws in subsequent years that abolished the tithe tax and outlawed the wearing of the fez, a felt hat worn by Muslim men that had become a symbol of political Islam.⁴ Atatürk also took umbrage with the veil worn by women, although he never officially outlawed its wear. He denounced these articles of clothing as foreign inventions that were not traditionally Turkish. He advocated for a social order that valued the contributions of men and women alike and that capitalized upon the contributions of all citizens. He advanced this ideal by repealing the Islamic Holy Law and implementing a new civil and penal code that was largely based upon European law.

¹ Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Treaty of Sèvres," <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Sevres> (accessed Oct 11, 2016).

² Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. "Treaty of Lausanne," <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Lausanne-1923> (accessed October 11, 2016).

³ Douglas Howard, *The History of Turkey* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

This new code made polygamy illegal and implemented other policies that improved the legal standing of women. The republic took a further step towards secularization in 1928 when Parliament removed the phrase “the religion of the Turkish state is Islam” from the constitution.

At the end of 1928, Atatürk undertook the incredible step of abolishing the Arabic alphabet as the basis for the written Turkish language. Arabic had been used with the Turkish language for nearly one thousand years, so changing to the Roman script was no small venture. Atatürk was so committed to this endeavor that he travelled around the country to personally teach and demonstrate the new alphabet on small blackboards that he had set up on easels. He advocated the change for numerous reasons related to literacy and simplicity. But at the heart of his plan was a desire to associate Turkey with what he saw as the world’s dominant and most influential civilization, that of Western Europe. The change distanced Turkey from a past that Atatürk viewed as primitive and limiting, and brought it closer to the modern, Western way of life that Atatürk sought as a means of bringing prosperity to the Turkish people.⁵

Atatürk understood that changing the laws and the official documents that established the system of governance would accomplish only so much. Complete change would have to be affected by changing Turkish culture and history. To achieve this goal, he founded a Turkish History Research Society and a Turkish Language Society, with the objective of cleansing the Turkish language and history of any remnants of Arabic or Persian influence. He mandated that everyone adopt a Turkish surname. It was at this time that he changed his name to Atatürk, meaning “Father Turk.”⁶

⁵ Ibid., 97-99.

⁶ Ibid., 104-105.

Atatürk's efforts largely succeeded in altering the structures that constituted the Turkish nation. His beliefs and ambitions gave birth to an ideology that is often referred to as "Kemalism," and in many ways Kemalism is itself a religion. He created a new Turkish national identity that has endured to the present day.⁷ The Kemalist ideal has been central to the identity of the Turkish republic. Throughout the republic's history, the secular elite have striven to maintain Kemalism's prominent place in the system of government. This has meant that at times the elite has resorted to violent political uprisings and coups in order to keep the ruling party within secular bounds.

In spite of Atatürk's Westernization of Turkey, the new nation was not embraced as part of the European community. Part of this was due to Turkey's geography; over 75% of the nation's landmass does not lie on the European continent. But part of this was also due to Atatürk's approach to Westernization. He was very internally focused; he desired to shape the people and the culture of Turkey and placed little emphasis on reaching out to the nations of Europe. Atatürk intentionally limited his efforts to establishing influence within Anatolia and eastern Thrace, and no further. Turkish foreign policy consisted of shoring up the national independence they had won in the Treaty of Lausanne and nothing else. This lack of true foreign policy kept Turkey somewhat isolated from the West.⁸

Turkey maintained this approach to foreign engagement even as war threatened. In 1939, as Europe descended into war, Turkish leaders feared getting drawn into a conflict that they knew they could not win. As a result, Turkey maintained its diplomatic distance from the Allied nations of Western Europe. When Germany moved into the Balkans in 1941, Turkey's president signed a non-aggression pact with the Nazis. Germany advanced to

⁷ Ibid., 107-108.

⁸ Ibid., 94.

Turkey's border but no further. In February 1945 when the war's end was in sight, Turkey officially joined the Allies, but this was a step taken only to facilitate its entry into the United Nations.⁹ Partially as a result of its isolationist approach to foreign relations, the post-war Western powers continued to view Turkey as a nation with which they could potentially work, but not as a part of the West.

⁹ Ibid., 110-112.

Chapter Two

The NATO-Turkey Relationship

Since its inception in 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has been the longest enduring and most credible military alliance of modern times. The alliance was birthed in the wake of World War II with the goal of preventing the revival of European nationalistic militarism and conflict that had led to over fifty million dead soldiers and civilians on the European continent in the first half of the twentieth century. However, the nations that would comprise NATO soon realized that the most likely future conflict would not be between the nations of Western Europe, but between the liberal democracies of the West and the oppressive communist regimes of the USSR and its satellites. The West was confronted by increasing levels of Soviet aggression, demonstrated through the Soviet blockade of West Berlin and its covert support for the communist overthrow of the democratically elected government of Czechoslovakia. As a result, NATO developed into the military organization through which the United States and its allies would counter the Soviet threat in Europe.¹

As Stalin predicted in a speech to American workers in 1927, the post-WWII world developed into two centers of significance: a socialist center, represented by the Soviet Union, and a capitalist center, represented by NATO and led by the United States. As Stalin further predicted, these centers drew to themselves nations with similar interests.² Nations

¹ NATO, "A Short History of NATO," NATO, http://nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_139339.htm (accessed February 5, 2017).

² George Kennan, "Telegraphic Message from Moscow of February 22, 1946 (Kennan's Long Telegram)," Brooklyn College History Department, <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/history/johnson/longtelegram.htm> (accessed September 20, 2016).

around the globe increasingly feared the threat of global war and sought to align themselves with one of the two great powers. As part of this process of polar alignment, NATO began to consider the possibility of adding member nations in order to increase its strategic leverage against the USSR. Turkey was one of the nations that NATO first considered.

Turkey was an unusual case. As stated previously, most Europeans still did not consider Turkey to be part of the West, and it seemingly shared few commonalities with the other members of NATO. However, its geographic location was of particular interest to the alliance. Turkey shared a border with the Soviet Union, and it also controlled the Dardanelles, which served as the Soviet Black Sea Fleet's access to the Mediterranean and thus the rest of the world. By this time, Turkey had also developed a credible military. All of these factors would make Turkey a valuable member of the alliance.³

Likewise, Turkey began to show interest in NATO. The location that was so strategically important to the alliance was a source of vulnerability for Turkey. The USSR had made overtures toward Turkey in an attempt to bring it into the Soviet sphere of influence, and the Turks were fearful of what the USSR might do to accomplish this. This made Turkey very interested in the security that membership in NATO offered.⁴ But perhaps even more important to Turkey than security was the identity as a Western nation that Turkey would gain as a NATO member.⁵ As mentioned in the previous section, since its founding, Turkey has sought to identify itself as a Western nation with Western norms and values. Admittance into the military security organization of the West not only indicated that the

³ Tarik Oğuzlu, "Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey's Approach Within NATO Tell Us?" *Turkish Studies* Vol. 14 No. 4 (December 2013): 781.

⁴ Jim Zanotti, *Turkey: Background and US Relations*, Congressional Research Office, October 5, 2015 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 36.

⁵ Oğuzlu, 781.

nations of NATO recognized and accepted Turkey's status as a Western nation, but it also bolstered its Western credentials throughout the rest of the world. After a brief period of courtship between Turkey and NATO, Turkey became a member of the alliance in 1952.

Turkey's history in NATO has been largely cooperative, but at times the relationship has been beset by significant disagreements. Some of the differences have been with individual member nations, and sometimes they have been with the organization as a whole. In examining Turkey's current relationship with NATO, it is useful to look at the nature of some of the more significant historical disagreements.

Perhaps the most significant historical conflict has centered around the political situation on Cyprus. Cyprus existed as a British colony until 1960, when it became an independent republic. The treaty that guaranteed Cyprus's independence was signed by three guarantors: The United Kingdom, Greece, and Turkey. As one of the three guarantors, Turkey viewed itself as the defender of Cyprus's ethnic Turkish population from potential mistreatment by the ethnic Greek majority. In 1974, this led Turkey to intervene militarily when it became concerned that political agreements between Cyprus and Greece would lead to Greece's annexation of the island nation. Turkey established military control over the northern part of Cyprus, essentially creating an ethnic Turkish enclave on the island. In subsequent years Turkey proceeded to resettle tens of thousands of Turks to northern Cyprus as a means of changing the ratio of Greeks to Turks in its own favor.⁶ This geographical separation continues today, with the international community recognizing that the ethnic Greek-ruled Republic of Cyprus has jurisdiction over the entire island, while Turkey

⁶ Hansjörg Brey and Günter Heinritz, "Ethnicity and Demographic Changes in Cyprus: In the 'Statistical Fog,'" *Geographica Slovenica* Vol. 24 (1993): 204-205.

recognizes a so-called Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in the northern part of the island.⁷

This situation predictably led to tension with Greece, its neighbor and fellow NATO ally, that endures to this day. Additionally, due to Turkey's use of US-supplied weapons during its military occupation of Cyprus, the US Congress placed an embargo on military grants and arms sales that lasted until 1978.⁸ The fact that one ally would impose an embargo against another demonstrates the depths to which the relationship between the US and Turkey has periodically dipped.

More recent disagreements between Turkey and NATO have occurred over issues ranging from operational deployments to the selection of NATO leadership. When NATO decided to deploy forces to Libya in 2011, Turkey was initially opposed to the action. Leaders in Ankara expressed their disapproval, asking "What has NATO to do in Libya? NATO's intervention in Libya is out of the question. We are against such a thing."⁹ In order to avoid characterization by other Islamic countries as being no different than the other Western powers within NATO, Turkey has increasingly sought legitimacy for NATO military operations through support from other international organizations.¹⁰ Accordingly, Turkey linked its resistance to the lack of endorsement that the operation had received from organizations such as the Arab League and the African Union. Turkey's leaders voiced criticism that NATO should not be a tool used to force regime change in predominantly

⁷ Zanoliti, 33.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Bill Park, "Turkey's Isolated Stance: An Ally No More, or Just the Usual Turbulence?" *International Affairs* Vol. 91, No. 3 (May 2015): 587.

¹⁰ Oğuzlu, 783.

Muslim nations. Its opposition to the plan weakened as NATO later received support from the Arab League, the African Union, and the United Nations.

The nomination of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as NATO's Secretary General in 2009 created another row between Turkey and its NATO allies. The dispute had its roots in the so-called "Danish Cartoon Controversy of 2006." The controversy began when a Danish newspaper published multiple cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed as a terrorist. Rasmussen, who was the Danish Prime Minister at the time, refused to apologize and defended the paper's right to publish such cartoons, saying that "freedom of speech is absolute."¹¹ When NATO later nominated Rasmussen to be the Secretary General, Turkey vetoed the nomination. Erdoğan, who was prime minister at the time, strongly opposed Rasmussen's nomination, asking "How can someone who did not stop this [cartoons] safeguard peace? NATO is an organization whose duties are to ensure peace."¹² The disagreement continued for several months, finally ending when leaders in Brussels promised Erdoğan that Rasmussen would appoint a Turk to be one of NATO's deputy secretaries.¹³

More recently, Turkey has been the lone member of NATO to oppose the establishment of a permanent Israeli ambassador to NATO Headquarters in Brussels. When the idea was proposed in early 2016, Turkey vetoed it. Its opposition was the product of an increasingly quarrelsome relationship between Turkey and Israel. A rift between the two formerly close nations developed in 2010 when Israeli forces attacked a ship that was delivering aid to Gaza in violation of an Israeli blockade. During the attack, nine Turkish

¹¹ Jørgen S. Nielsen, "Danish Cartoons in Christian-Muslim Relations in Denmark," *Exchange* Vol. 39, No. 3 (2010) 225.

¹² Ian Traynor, "Bitter Turkey Finally Lifts Veto on Danish PM as NATO Chief," *The Guardian*, April 4, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/apr/05/nato-eu-denmark-turkey> (accessed October 22, 2016).

¹³ Serhat Güven. and Soli Özel, "NATO and Turkey in the Post-Cold War World: Between Abandonment and Entrapment," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* Vol. 12, No. 4 (December 2012): 543.

civilians were killed. In September 2016, as the relationship once again improved, Turkey dropped its veto, paving the way for the opening of the new office.¹⁴

Of course, Turkey and NATO have a long history of cooperation. Turkey permitted the deployment of nuclear-armed Jupiter missiles on its territory in the 1960's, a situation that became a key point of contention during the Cuban Missile Crisis. It also agreed in 2011 to host an early warning radar site that would serve as part of the NATO ballistic missile defense system. It made this decision in spite of objections from Iran and Russia. And notably, in all of the aforementioned disagreements, excepting Cyprus, Turkey eventually acquiesced and came into agreement with the other member nations.

These examples are not meant to indicate that the relationship between NATO and Turkey has been one-sided, with the alliance continually requesting support from Turkey with no reciprocity. The relationship has been give-and-take, with Turkey requesting aid from its allies on multiple occasions. Since January 2013, at Turkey's request, NATO has deployed theater ballistic missile defense units in southern Turkey to protect against errant Syrian-launched ballistic missiles.¹⁵

As demonstrated in the examples above, Turkey has had its share of disagreements with NATO. But this is historically true with any alliance, and Turkey and NATO are no different. Each entity continues to present value to the other, and to this point they have continued to cooperate in many real and tangible ways.

¹⁴ Lars Andersen, "Israel Gets NATO Ambassador," *Brussels Times*, September 20, 2016, <http://www.brusselstimes.com/brussels/6487/israel-gets-nato-ambassador> (accessed October 22, 2016).

¹⁵ NATO, "NATO Support to Turkey," NATO, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_92555.htm? (accessed 21 Sep 2016).

Chapter Three

Pursuing Security in the Middle East and Leadership in the West

Turkey's geographic location has served it well in many respects. It draws upon its unique location to advertise to tourists that it is where the East meets the West, and it possesses the "only city that is on two continents."¹ But its location on the fringes of both Europe and the Middle East has also created a number of security challenges for Turkey. Although many of these situations have a long history that predates its actual birth as a nation, they continue to have a significant influence on stability in the region.

For centuries, large numbers of ethnic Kurds have lived in the area in and around northern Iraq, northern Syria, and southern Turkey. This ethnic minority has a long history of struggle with the governments of these nations as it has sought greater political recognition and its own nation state. In Turkey, the Kurdish population is approximately 18% of the total population. The Turkish Kurds formed a political organization called the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Since the early 1980's this group has carried out terrorist attacks in various urban centers in southeastern Turkey, sometimes using safe areas in neighboring countries from which to launch its attacks. Turkey has long justified the use of heavy-handed tactics to subdue the Kurds, at times arousing criticism from Western governments and human rights organizations.²

In addition to the problems Turkey has with the Kurds, it has had to deal in recent years with violence begotten by the civil war in Syria. This extremely violent conflict began

¹ Turkish Culture and Tourism Office, "Go Turkey," Turkish Culture and Tourism Office, <http://www.tourismturkey.org> (accessed October 17, 2016).

² Jim Zanotti, *Turkey: Background and US Relations*, Congressional Research Office, October 5, 2015 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 8.

in 2011 during the Arab Spring. It has destabilized an already precarious region and increased the threat of violence along Turkey's southern border. The war has drawn many actors to the region, and almost all of them have differing reasons for being there. This has created a volatile environment that has pulled Turkey in several different geo-political directions.

The Arab Spring was characterized by the emergence of revolutionary groups throughout the region rising up against their governments in search of democratic reforms. As these events unfolded in Syria, Turkey attempted to use its recently improved relations with Syria to encourage Syrian president Bashar al-Assad to negotiate with the reformers and implement a portion of the requested reforms. Assad was unwilling to do so, and instead strictly cracked down on the protesters. As the situation deteriorated into civil war, Turkey largely blamed Assad's refusal to negotiate and his harsh enforcement methods. Turkish leaders publicly criticized the Syrian government, and by the end of the year, Erdoğan called for Assad's resignation.³

Turkey began to allow the Syrian opposition forces to use its territory to move people and weapons into Syria. In some instances, this was reportedly done in consultation with the United States. But as the conflict continued, the constitution of the rebel forces became less and less clear, leading the United States to stop facilitating these actions for fear of potentially arming Sunni Islamist radical forces. Ankara, however, remained focused on the goal of removing Assad from power, and was less concerned than some of its Western allies

³ Thowhidul Islam, "Turkey's AKP Foreign Policy Shift Toward Syria: Shifting Policy During the Arab Spring," *International Journal on World Peace* Vol. XXXIII, No.1 (March 2016): 9-10.

about the composition of the rebel forces. Accordingly, Turkey continued to allow foreign fighters to use its territory.⁴

The volatility in the region allowed a group of jihadists to organize the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and establish a stronghold in the region to begin carrying out attacks on Christians and Kurds in northern Iraq. The violence in the region increased quickly, leading the US to begin limited military operations against the group. When American journalist James Foley was brutally beheaded by ISIL in late August 2014, the US increased the intensity of its military involvement against ISIL. The US effort focused mainly on carrying out airstrikes against ISIL targets, with the American government being unwilling to deploy large numbers of US ground forces to the region. Instead, the US relied on other nascent ground forces in the region to battle ISIL, the most effective of these being the Syrian Kurdish Party (PYD/YPG). This group's effectiveness against ISIL led to the United States providing it with weapons and training with which to battle the jihadist forces.⁵

Turkey has long associated the PYD/YPG with the PKK, and has suspected it of providing weapons and sanctuary for the PKK to carry out its terrorist attacks in Turkey. Ankara has officially designated both organizations as terrorist groups, but notably, Washington and the EU only consider the PKK to be a terrorist group.⁶ Turkey has predictably objected to the US providing arms to an organization that it believes to be supporting terrorist attacks within its borders. As Turkey joined the US in carrying out

⁴ Lale Sariibrahimoglu, "On the Borderline – Turkey's Ambiguous Approach to Islamic State," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, October 16, 2014, <http://janes.ihs.com.nduezproxy.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/1725530> (accessed February 11, 2017).

⁵ Zanotti, 27-28.

⁶ Özgür Ünlühisarcıklı, "Turkey Needs to Shift Its Policy Toward Syria's Kurds —and the United States Should Help," *German Marshall Fund of the United States Policy Brief*, March 2, 2016, <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/turkey-needs-shift-its-policy-toward-syrias-kurds> (accessed February 11, 2016).

airstrikes against ISIL, it also resumed military operations against the PKK. Many in the west find the timing convenient, and believe that Turkey is taking advantage of the situation to contain Kurdish political ambitions. Western analysts have noted that Turkey appears to focus more of its military effort on Kurdish forces than on the Islamic State.⁷ But Turkish leaders believe that the US is not sufficiently sensitive to Turkey's unique security environment. In September 2015, the Turkish Prime Minister said, "By mounting operations against [IS] and the PKK at the same time, we also prevented the PKK from legitimizing itself. Until the PYD changes its stance, we will continue to see it in the same way that we see the PKK."⁸ One year after these statements, the Turkish defense minister said, "Islamic State should be completely cleansed, this is an absolute must. But it's not enough for us ... The PYD and the YPG militia should not replace Islamic State there."⁹

As Syria's president became more embattled, the conflict drew Russian forces to the region. Russia supports Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and has deployed its military forces to support the Syrian nationalist forces against the rebels. The Russian presence has introduced even more volatility into the region, as many of the forces that Russia is targeting are the same forces that the US relies upon (the PYD/YPG) to battle ISIL. The situation has also increased tensions along Turkey's southern border. Its airspace has been violated by ballistic missiles from Syria, as well as by Russian combat aircraft. In 2015, Turkey even shot down a Russian fighter jet that entered its airspace without permission, an event that prompted NATO to issue a statement indicating its support of "the territorial integrity of our

⁷ Zanotti, 20.

⁸ Semih Idiz, "Turkey's Middle East Policy 'Fiasco,'" *Al-Monitor Turkey Pulse*, September 28, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/originals/2015/09/turkey-syria-usa-ankara-dream-to-set-up-three-cities.html> (accessed September 21, 2016).

⁹ Humeyra Pamuk and Umit Bektas, "Turkey Fires on US-Backed Kurdish Militia in Syria Offensive," *Reuters*, August 26, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-turkey-idUSKCN10Z07J> (accessed October 19, 2016).

NATO ally, Turkey.”¹⁰ This territorial integrity has also been challenged by Kurdish forces that have moved into and out of Turkey, and have at times been met with Turkish military resistance. In August 2016, Turkey mounted an offensive operation into Syria to drive the PYD and YPG across the Euphrates River, again drawing stiff criticism from the United States.¹¹

The war in Syria has created an enormous flow of refugees. As the refugees fled the conflict in Syria, they frequently moved northward through Turkey on their way to Western Europe. This created consternation in Europe as the large numbers of refugees have stressed the European nations’ abilities to provide support for them. In addition to the strain on the social welfare system, Europe has been wracked by terrorist attacks in Germany, France, and Belgium. Many European citizens have attributed these attacks to terrorists that have made their way to Europe by blending in with the flow of refugees. Much blame has been placed on Turkey due to its perceived weak border enforcement. This has led to a rise in nationalist populism within the European Union, with nations such as Hungary taking extreme measures to keep migrants out of their countries. Many analysts reference the European refugee crisis as one reason that the UK voted to leave the EU.¹² Turkey’s border laws have also been blamed by the West for allowing foreign jihadists to transit Turkey into Syria. During testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Director of National Intelligence

¹⁰ Don Melvin, Michael Martinez, “Putin Calls Jet’s Down ‘Stab in the Back;’ Turkey Says Warning Ignored,” [cnn.com](http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/middleeast/warplane-crashes-near-syria-turkey-border/), November 24, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/11/24/middleeast/warplane-crashes-near-syria-turkey-border/> (accessed October 19, 2016).

¹¹ Pamuk and Bektas.

¹² George Friedman, “3 Reasons Brits Voted for Brexit,” *Forbes*, July 5, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/johnmauldin/2016/07/05/3-reasons-brits-voted-for-brexite/#62be278178c1> (accessed October 19, 2016).

James Clapper described a “permissive environment” that allowed relatively free flow of foreign fighters through Turkey into Syria.¹³

Turkey finds itself in a difficult situation as it attempts balance its own interests with those of its allies. As the US works to coordinate military operations with both Turkey and the PYD/YPG, it often finds Turkey attacking the very groups that the US is equipping. As EU member states struggle to provide social support to refugees while also suffering from terrorist attacks, they find Turkey lackadaisically enforcing its borders. As Turkey continues to call for Assad’s removal, Russia deploys military force in an attempt to keep Assad in power. The situation has created pressure on leaders from Washington to Brussels to Berlin to Ankara, forcing all of them to accept a less-than-ideal set of circumstances.

¹³ Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing to Receive Testimony on Worldwide Threats*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., 2015, 39.

Chapter Four

Changes in the Domestic Political Landscape

As discussed in a previous section, the Turkish republic was founded on the idea of Kemalism, an idea that Turkish civilization should be governed more by intellect and reason than by religion, as it had been under Ottoman rule. Over the decades since Atatürk's death, members of Turkey's secular elite worked to maintain the Kemalist influence against potential religious and political extremists. Members of this secular elite have largely come from the military and the judiciary. In their attempt to guard Kemalism, these elites have not always used democratic practices.¹ For a nation that aspires to be Western, it has at times undertaken some decidedly non- Western methods. Turkey has had four coups since 1960, with the most recent successful coup occurring in 1997.²

The 1997 coup resulted in the banning of the Welfare Party, the party to which Erdoğan then belonged. Erdoğan was the mayor of Istanbul at the time, and his actions while in office left no doubt that he was not a Kemalist. He once famously said, "One ought not to stand [in respect, stiff] like a straw on Atatürk's commemoration events."³ Following the coup in 1997, Erdoğan participated in a protest of the court's decision to ban the Welfare Party. During the protest he read aloud from a poem that contained the following lines:

¹ Jim Zanotti, *Turkey: Background and US Relations*, Congressional Research Office, October 5, 2015 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015), 4.

² Amy Austin Holmes, "On Military Coups and Mad Utopias," *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol. 113, No. 2 (Spring 2014): 391.

³ Michael Rubin, "Will Erdoğan close Atatürk Mausoleum?" American Enterprise Institute, August 9, 2016, <https://www.aei.org/publication/will-erdogan-close-ataturks-mausoleum/> (accessed October 19, 2016).

The mosques are our barracks,
The domes our helmets,
The minarets our bayonets,
And the faithful our soldiers...⁴

This led to his arrest and imprisonment for violating secularist law and inciting religious hatred.

As further example of his anti-Kemalist leanings, while serving as prime minister, he changed the traditional backdrop that had been used by previous prime ministers when giving a television address. The previous backdrop was a Turkish flag next to a portrait of Atatürk; the new backdrop consisted of a photograph of Atatürk's mausoleum alongside a mosque. The message that many received was that Atatürk was dead, but Islam still lives.⁵

Erdoğan's history provide insight into his aspirations now that he is Turkey's president. But in the event that his previous attempts at messaging were not completely clear, he has made numerous public statements since becoming president about his goals and visions for the Turkish republic. In 2014, Erdoğan stated that his goal was "to raise a religious generation."⁶ He has even made clear how he intends to implement his policy of Islamism, saying in 2015 that "there is a president with de facto power in the country, not a symbolic one... Whether one accepts it or not, Turkey's administrative system has changed. Now what should be done is to update this de facto situation in the legal framework of the constitution."⁷ Turkey's office of the presidency has historically been vested with very little

⁴ Raziye Akkoc, "Turkey's Most Powerful President Since Atatürk: A Profile on Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/11548369/Turkeys-most-powerful-president-since-Ataturk-A-profile-of-Recep-Tayyip-Erdogan.html> (accessed October 19, 2016).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Michael Rubin, "Is Turkey Poised to Become an Islamic Republic?" *Newsweek*, April 27, 2016, <http://www.newsweek.com/turkey-poised-become-islamic-republic-453096>, (accessed October 19, 2016).

⁷ Burak Bekdil, "Erdoğan's One-Man Islamist Show," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol.23, No. 2, (Spring 2016): 3.

power, with most decisions made by the Prime Minister. In this speech, President Erdoğan explicitly laid out his plan to alter Turkey's legal framework in order to consolidate executive power in his office, while admitting that he is already acting beyond the power he has been legally granted. In January 2017, Turkey's Parliament, led by Erdoğan's AKP Party, began debating a new draft constitution that would codify the changes desired by Erdoğan, including the abolition of the position of Prime Minister.⁸

These examples best illustrate the two adjectives that are most commonly associated with Erdoğan's style of governance: Islamist and authoritarian. Since his ascendancy to prime minister in 2003 and his election as president in 2014, he has led a process that has gradually increased the power of civilian leaders at the expense of the secular elite, particularly the military. He has been helped along by a base of voters that support his Justice and Development Party's (AKP) Islamic-leaning platform.⁹ Many of Erdoğan's domestic policies have drawn criticism from his Western allies, as they have been seen to encroach on civil liberties.

From the beginning of his administration, Erdoğan has been extremely intolerant of critical press coverage. The organization Reporters Without Borders has ranked Turkey 151st out of 180 countries in its 2016 world press freedom index.¹⁰ Turkey has more journalists in prison at the time of this writing than either China or Iran.¹¹ His unwillingness to be questioned by a disapproving press was on display during a March 2016 visit to Washington,

⁸ French Press Agency in Istanbul, "Turkish Parliament Debates Controversial New Constitution," *The Guardian*, January 9, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/09/turkish-parliament-controversial-new-constitution-recep-tayyip-erdogan> (accessed January 10, 2017).

⁹ Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, *Turkey: Background and US Relations in Brief*, Congressional Research Office, August 26, 2016 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2016), 2.

¹⁰ Reporters Without Borders, "World Press Freedom Index," Reporters Without Borders, April 20, 2016, <https://rsf.org/en/ranking> (accessed October 19, 2016).

¹¹ Halil Karaveli, "Erdoğan's Journey," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 6 (November/December 2016): 125.

DC, when Erdoğan's security detail attempted to physically remove "undesired" journalists, much to the dismay of his hosts at the Brookings Institute.¹²

His disregard for the rule of law is another characteristic that has distanced him from other Western governments. As referenced earlier in this chapter, Erdoğan is not above changing the law in order to grant himself more power. Turkish law actually prohibited him from holding public office due to his incarceration. He relied upon his party to push a change to this law through Parliament to allow him to serve as prime minister. After becoming prime minister, he changed the law again to allow the government to arrest the plotters of the 1997 coup that resulted in the banishment of his previous political party and his ultimate imprisonment.¹³

Erdoğan's actions on the domestic front eventually led to another coup attempt. In July 2016, members of the Turkish military staged a coup in order to return the government to a more centrist, Kemalist system. The coup was unsuccessful, and ultimately resulted in granting Erdoğan an increased mandate to centralize his power. The president accused the coup leaders of being followers of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric living in the mountains of Pennsylvania who is a political rival of the president.¹⁴ Erdoğan used the coup as justification to purge the military, ridding senior ranks of officers that he believed were followers of Gülen. Many of these officers had spent time working and training with NATO and were considered by Erdoğan to have had significant, perhaps undue, Western influence.

¹² Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkey's Downward Spiral and Erdoğan's Brookings Speech," Brookings Institute, April 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/04/turkeys-downward-spiral-and-the-scuffles-at-erdogans-brookings-speech/> (accessed October 25, 2016).

¹³ Karaveli, 123-124.

¹⁴ Zanolli and Thomas, 1.

He also arrested educators, police, judges, and other government workers that he believed to be disloyal. According to reports published in the weeks following the coup attempt, approximately 80,000 people were removed from their posts at various Turkish state institutions, with over 18,000 of these actually being arrested.¹⁵ The prisons, which were already overcrowded, became filled well beyond capacity. The United Nations and Amnesty International both expressed concern about the alleged torture of political prisoners.¹⁶

Turkey's relationship with its Western allies was further strained when Turkish officials accused the United States of having prior knowledge of the coup, and in some instances that it was even involved. These accusations were exacerbated by the US's refusal to extradite Gülen. A formal request for extradition has been pending since before the coup attempt, but the coup has brought renewed attention to the request. President Erdoğan sees the decision as an either-or for the United States, saying "sooner or later, the US will make a choice. Either Turkey or FETO."¹⁷

Western leaders were not quick to express support for Erdoğan in the days following the coup. The US sent the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to visit Turkey, but his visit was military in nature. The first US political meeting following the coup was over one month later when the Vice President visited Ankara. This was also the first visit by any political leader from a NATO member nation.

¹⁵ İlhan Tanir, "Failed Coup Just Latest Crisis Pushing Turkey Away From West," Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, August 14, 2016, <http://www.rferl.org/a/turkey-failed-coup-just-latest-crisis-with-west/27920722.html> (accessed August 15, 2016).

¹⁶ Zanotti and Thomas, 4.

¹⁷ Karen DeYoung, "Turkish Evidence for Gülen Extradition Pre-dates Coup Attempt," *Washington Post*, August 19, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/turkish-evidence-for-gulen-extradition-pre-dates-coup-attempt/2016/08/19/390cb0ec-6656-11e6-be4e-23fc4d4d12b4_story.html (accessed October 15, 2016).

Erdoğan expressed his concern over the apparent lack of support from his allies by travelling to Russia to meet with Vladimir Putin. During a press conference with the Russian Premier, Erdoğan asked “Does the West side with democracy or the coup...”¹⁸ Erdoğan finally had an opportunity to meet with President Obama at the G20 summit in September 2016. Following this meeting, Erdoğan curbed his rhetoric about the West’s support for the coup. A subsequent visit to Ankara by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg further smoothed relations. However, as of late 2016, tens of thousands of people remain in prison on charges related to the coup.

¹⁸ PBS, “Erdoğan Visits Russia After Coup Attempt Stirs Tensions With the West,” *PBS*, August 9, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/erdogan-visits-russia-coup-attempt-stirs-tensions-west/> (accessed October 22, 2016).

Chapter Five

Erdoğan's Aspirations for Turkey

In light of Erdoğan's efforts to consolidate power for himself, this section will attempt to determine the purposes for which he intends to use this power. How does Turkey's history as a republic, its historic relationship with NATO, and its unique security challenges combine with Erdoğan's authoritarian nature to potentially illuminate the aspirations he has for Turkey?

When Atatürk founded the modern Turkish republic, he eschewed all aspirations of being a world power.¹ Subsequent Turkish rulers have generally followed this example, with the occasional foray beyond these frontiers (such as Cyprus). Under Erdoğan's direction, however, Turkey's prominence on the international scene has risen dramatically. Many of his stated policy goals are a significant departure from those of his predecessors. These policies have not just been in the domestic realm, as described earlier in the paper, but also in international relations. His measures to shore up executive power appear to be an attempt to firmly establish himself as a new kind of leader who is able to take his country in a new direction as a regional power, leveraging its own economic and diplomatic strengths, as well as those of the multinational organizations to which it belongs.²

Turkey has shown a particular interest in asserting itself as a regional leader in the Middle East. It has begun relying more on its soft power to influence other regional actors,

¹ Douglas Howard, *The History of Turkey* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 107.

² Tarik Oğuzlu, "Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey's Approach Within NATO Tell Us?" *Turkish Studies* Vol. 14 No. 4 (December 2013): 774-775.

rather than simply using the threat of military force as it has done in the past.³ According to former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey seeks “maximum integration in the neighborhood, involvement in nearby regions, and development of ties in areas such as Africa, Asia, and Latin America.”⁴ Turkey recognizes that its geography places it in the very center of an area where great changes are affecting the entire world. It believes that it is “incumbent on Turkey to assume more responsibilities in [its] region” to prevent the problems engulfing its region from spreading and deepening. Turkey believes that its level of economic development and democracy provide it with more influence than it had in the past, and that this power is needed more than ever in the region.⁵

This power has been demonstrated in Turkey’s relations with its neighboring countries. Under Atatürk and other leaders, Turkey was reticent to try to influence its neighbors. However, this has changed in recent years as Turkey has sought to have “zero problems with [its] neighbors.”⁶ This approach is best seen in its relationship with Syria, a nation with which Turkey has a long history of enmity. Although the poor relations date back to the days of the Ottoman Empire, the new Turkish Republic did nothing to improve these relations. When Syria sought independence from its French colonial rulers in 1936, Turkey convinced France to cede the province of Hatay, which was previously part of Syria, to Turkey. There have also been disagreements about water sharing over the years, and the Cold

³ Gülnur Aybet, “The Evolution of NATO’s Three Phases and Turkey’s Transatlantic Relationship,” *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 31.

⁴ Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Transformation of NATO and Turkey’s Position,” *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 16.

⁵ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa> (accessed October 21, 2016).

⁶ Ibid.

War placed the two nations on opposite sides as Turkey became part of NATO and Syria aligned with the USSR.⁷

Turkish-Syrian relations began to improve with the signing of the Adana Accords in 1998, but when Erdoğan became Prime Minister in 2003, he did much more to improve the relationship. He quickly made friends with new Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, who became the first Syrian president to visit Ankara since the Ottoman Empire fell. Erdoğan returned the favor by visiting Damascus in 2004, and by the end of that year the two countries had signed a free trade agreement.

Turkey's soft power influence led Syria to officially acknowledge the province of Hatay as a part of Turkey, a disagreement that dated back over 80 years. The two countries participated in joint military exercises, making Turkey the only NATO nation to train with Syria. The nations' friendship reached such a level that visa restrictions were lifted between the neighbors in 2009, allowing free and easy travel between the two nations. Davutoğlu, who was then foreign minister, said to the people of Syria that "Turkey is your second country and the Turkish people are waiting for you with open arms without a visa."⁸

In 2009, Turkey mediated a crisis caused by multiple bombings that occurred in Baghdad's Green Zone. Iraq blamed the bombings on Syria, but Turkey defused the situation.⁹ This reconciliation between its neighbors was demonstrative of Turkey's status as a burgeoning regional leader.

One of Erdoğan's most significant departures from prior policy was his approach to the Kurdish situation. He was the first Turkish ruler to approach this decades-long security

⁷ Thowhidul Islam, "Turkey's AKP Foreign Policy Shift Toward Syria: Shifting Policy During the Arab Spring," *International Journal on World Peace* Vol. XXXIII, No.1 (March 2016): 14-15.

⁸ Ibid., 17.

⁹ Ibid., 16.

dilemma with a genuine desire to seek peace with the Kurds. He made efforts to appeal to their shared Sunni Muslim identities.¹⁰ He allowed towns to use their Kurdish-language names and permitted schools to teach classes in Kurdish. He worked closely with the Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan to implement these concessions.¹¹

Turkey's policy of zero problems with its neighbors includes – to the increasing consternation of the West – its neighbor to the north: Russia. Although the two nations no longer share a border, they continue to share interests in many common areas, including the Caucasus, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and the Black Sea. Additionally, Turkey has significant economic ties to Russia, including energy production and tourism. This relationship has held the two nations close to each other, even at times when potential has existed for rifts to develop. NATO has not always been pleased with the closeness between Erdoğan and Putin.

Turkey believes that the source of its increased prestige in the region is its level of economic development and democracy.¹² Accordingly, it must take steps to continue its development in these areas. A major step in this process would be acceptance into the European Union. As the European Union has grown in stature, Turkey has sought membership in this organization for the multiple benefits it would bring, namely increased trade and economic growth, open borders with Europe, and access to EU financial incentives. Additionally, EU membership would serve as further confirmation of Turkey's status as a part of the West.¹³

¹⁰ Halil Karaveli, "Erdoğan's Journey," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 6 (November/December 2016): 122.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹² Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¹³ Florian Eder, "Turkey's Man in Brussels: Don't Give Up On Us," *Politico*, August 12, 2016, <http://www.politico.eu/article/turkeys-man-in-brussels-dont-give-up-on-us-eu-migration-deal-putin-erdogan/> (accessed February 11, 2017).

Turkey's economy has shown tremendous growth in the last two decades. It is a member of the G20, and its economy is larger than all of its neighbors combined, excluding Iran and Russia. Inclusion in the EU would boost it even more. Greater than 40 percent of its trade is with the EU and the US, and two-thirds of its capital is invested in these two places.¹⁴ While they continue to negotiate EU membership, Turkey is aggressively pursuing inclusion in the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States and the European Union. Erdoğan even wrote a personal letter to President Obama regarding this topic.¹⁵

Despite being a prospective member of the EU since 1999, full-fledged membership continues to elude Turkey.¹⁶ Erdoğan's domestic policies have not endeared him to other EU leaders, and the flow of refugees that has flooded European nations has made them reluctant to open their borders with Turkey. Erdoğan's dismissal of Davutoğlu as prime minister in early 2016 potentially weakened relations, as he was a key architect of the agreement between the EU and Turkey regarding the return of refugees to Turkey.¹⁷ Although many of these issues are not specifically defense-related, the dynamics affect Turkey's relationship within NATO, due to the overlap of membership between the two organizations.

Many of Erdoğan's efforts have initially shown promise only to come to ignominious ends. Turkey is perhaps further away from EU membership than ever. His attempts at

¹⁴ Kemal Kirisci, "Turkey and the Transatlantic Trade Partnership – Boosting the Model Partnership With the United States," *Brookings Institute*, September 1, 2013 <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-and-the-transatlantic-trade-and-investment-partnership-boosting-the-model-partnership-with-the-united-states/> (accessed October 22, 2016).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ European Commission, "European Commission Enlargement," European Commission, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/eu_turkey_relations_en.htm accessed October 16, 2016.

¹⁷ Tim Arango and Ceylan Yeginsu, "How Erdogan Moved to Solidify Power by Ousting A Pivotal Ally," *New York Times*, May 5, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/06/world/europe/ahmet-davutoglu-turkey-prime-minister.html?_r=0 (accessed October 21, 2016).

reconciliation with both the Kurds and Syria have subsequently failed. The Turkish military has reengaged in fierce hostilities against the PKK, and Erdoğan has turned strongly against President Assad, calling for his resignation and condemning the actions he has taken against protesters. Nonetheless, the efforts undertaken by Erdoğan are indicative of a bold leader who is not beholden to the old way of doing things.

Chapter Six

Implications for NATO

The question must be asked, and indeed a main topic of this paper is, what are the implications for NATO? It is clear that Turkey seeks to carry out its “multi-dimensional foreign policy” without undue influence from its Western allies.¹ This is evident in its outreach toward non-Western nations, including Russia and China. But are these actions meant to be an intentional slight to NATO, or are they simply a means by which President Erdoğan seeks to demonstrate Turkey’s ability to act on its own, apart from its allies’ influence?

Since the end of the Cold War, and particularly since 2001, Turkey’s view of its national identity and its security interests have changed. This has coincided with NATO’s own revision of its purpose and identity.² NATO’s involvement in multiple out-of-area operations has created the perception that it has gradually become less Euro-centric in its security views, and more globally engaged. Many in Turkey are wary of NATO becoming beholden to the global security interests of the United States.³ This has led Turkey to assert itself within the alliance to a degree that it historically has not.

One example of this was NATO’s implementation of a European missile defense shield. Although it supported the plan in concept, Turkey ensured that its interests were fully considered by the alliance. These interests comprised the inclusion of Turkey in all decision-

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, “Transformation of NATO and Turkey’s Position,” *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 16.

² Tarik Oğuzlu, “Making Sense of Turkey’s Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey’s Approach Within NATO Tell Us?” *Turkish Studies* Vol. 14 No. 4 (December 2013): 781.

³ *Ibid.*, 782.

making mechanisms, and an assurance that the missile defense capability would provide coverage over all of Turkey's geography. Turkey also sought a guarantee that information collected by the missile defense system would not be shared with non-NATO nations. This was largely seen as an attempt to placate Iran by ensuring that Israel would not have access to the network.⁴

Other areas in which Turkey has asserted its influence include its initial opposition to the NATO-led operation to remove Qaddafi from power in Libya in 2011, the appointment of Anders Fogh Rasmussen as secretary general in 2009, and the opening of an Israeli office in NATO HQ in 2016. All of these issues were described in detail earlier in this paper.

Other examples of Turkey's behavior portray it as attempting to not just invoke its own interests, but as actually trying to provoke its allies. One such example regards Turkey's decision in 2013 to buy a Chinese missile system as part of its anti-missile defense system. The decision created division with the alliance because it meant that Turkey's systems would not be interoperable with those of its allies. Its decision led several members of Congress to write a letter to the Secretaries of Defense and State, asking them to "exert all available diplomatic pressure to prevent Turkish procurement of a [China Precision Military Import and Export Corp.] missile defense system and ensure NATO will never allow such a system to be integrated into NATO's security architecture."⁵ Following a series of side meetings at a G20 conference hosted by Turkey in late 2015, Ankara announced that it would no longer purchase the Chinese missile system. But the drama of the negotiations was another portrayal

⁴ Tarık Oğuzlu, "Testing the Strength of the Turkish-American Strategic Relationship Through NATO: Convergence or Divergence Within the Alliance?" *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* Vol.15, No. 2 (April 2013): 218.

⁵ US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China's Potential Air Defense System Sale to Turkey and Implications for the United States* (December 18, 2013), by Ethan Meick, Staff Report (Washington, D.C., 2013), 8.

of Turkey's intransigence in the pursuit of its own national interests and Erdoğan's willingness to go his own way, even in the face of staunch criticism from his allies.⁶

In all of these examples, Turkey has struck a hard stance while establishing its own course in pursuit of greater influence. Its approach has often rubbed its allies in an abrasive manner, but it has nearly always led to greater consideration for Turkey's interests with little or no tangible concessions required of its allies. It has appeared in all of these examples that Turkey has simply sought a greater acknowledgement of its influence within the organization.

⁶ Mustafa Kibaroglu and Selim C. Sazak, "Why Turkey Chose, and Then Rejected, a Chinese Air Defense Missile," *Defense One*, February 3, 2016, <http://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/02/turkey-china-air-defense-missile/125648/> (accessed October 16, 2016).

Chapter Seven

Turkish and NATO Interests: Converging or Diverging?

The previous section identified numerous instances where Turkey set off on a course in pursuit of its own interests that put it at odds with NATO. On their surface, these examples would seem to indicate a significant difference in Turkey's interests and those of NATO. But all of the aforementioned situations ended in the same way: Turkey went along with the alliance.

Turkey clearly sees itself as a stronger actor within its neighborhood than it has been in the past. Even as it seeks greater regional influence however, it sees a place for itself in NATO. As Davutoğlu has noted, "there are ... perspectives within NATO that assumes (sic) a *stronger role for some of its members*. There are also inclinations toward justifying *country specific interests* using NATO as a pretext." (emphasis added).¹ There can be no doubt that he believes Turkey is one of the members for which there is a stronger role. But he clearly sees his nation exercising this stronger role within the confines of NATO, not apart from it. Despite much publicity regarding Turkey's disagreements with its NATO allies, there is much to indicate that Turkey continues to share many interests with NATO.

Since 2001, Turkey has arguably taken stronger actions to strengthen alliance cohesion than have NATO's traditional power brokers. On the one hand, European powers have at times appeared interested in empowering a so-called EU Army. This effort has seen renewed interest with the departure from the European Union of the UK, which has

¹ Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Transformation of NATO and Turkey's Position," *Perceptions Journal of International Affairs* Vol. XVII, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 17.

historically opposed an EU Army.² On the other hand, the United States announced a “rebalance” to the Asia-Pacific region, and has at times taken major actions apart from NATO.³ Turkey has opposed both of these approaches.⁴ It believes that its place within the Western security community is more secure when European and American interests are addressed jointly within the NATO apparatus. This prevents Turkey from being forced to deal with each entity (the EU and the United States) bilaterally, where it has a weaker position. The pivot by the US to the Asia-Pacific meant a corresponding retrenchment of US forces and attention in the Middle East. In theory this allowed Turkey a greater opportunity to exercise its regional leadership. In reality, in the absence of US leadership and presence, instability and conflict returned to the region. And as it has many times before, Turkey looked to NATO for help when it felt threatened.⁵

In spite of various overtures that Turkey has made to non- Western nations, the fact remains that no other region can serve as an alternative to the West for Turkey. The perpetual instability surrounding Turkey’s geographic location makes the security umbrella provided by NATO of continued value.⁶ Turkey continues to rely upon NATO for many security-related missions, and is not hesitant to ask the alliance for help. Turkey has invoked Article 4 of the NATO Treaty more times than any other member nation: once in 2003, twice in 2012, and once again in 2015. Notably, all of these have been during Erdoğan’s tenure. Article 4

² Martin Banks, Peter Foster, “Europe Forges Ahead With Plans for ‘EU Army,’” *Telegraph*, September 6, 2016, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/06/europe-forges-ahead-with-plans-for-eu-army/> (accessed October 23, 2016).

³ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, February 2015), 24.

⁴ Tarık Oğuzlu, “Testing the Strength of the Turkish-American Strategic Relationship Through NATO: Convergence or Divergence Within the Alliance?” *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* Vol.15, No. 2 (April 2013): 216.

⁵ Tarık Oğuzlu, “Making Sense of Turkey’s Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey’s Approach Within NATO Tell Us?” *Turkish Studies* Vol. 14 No. 4 (December 2013): 788.

⁶ Katerina Dalacoura, “Muslim and Modern,” *Juncture* Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 2015): 327.

calls for consultation whenever in the opinion of any nation, “the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened”.⁷ The only other time Article 4 has been invoked was by Poland in 2014.⁸

In addition to the interests described above, Turkey’s relationship with the EU cannot be overlooked. As long as Turkey remains on the outside of the European Union, NATO remains the primary institution through which Turkey identifies with the West. Its membership in NATO provides it leverage in many ways. This is particularly true as the EU seeks greater military coordination with NATO. Turkey has expressed its concern about EU access to NATO capabilities. It is the only NATO member nation that has stated that EU access to NATO capabilities should require the consent of all member nations and should not be automatic.⁹

Turkey recognizes that in order to lead in Brussels, it must also be willing to lead on the battlefield. Turkey’s ambassador to Afghanistan has served as the NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. As of this writing, only four other NATO nations have more personnel deployed to Afghanistan than Turkey does. Turkey has further demonstrated its commitment by leading the Train Advise and Assist Command in Kabul, and being the lead-nation for IJCHQ until 2015.¹⁰ It regularly provides over 1000 personnel on high readiness for the NATO Response Force, and has agreed to rotate annually with six other allied nations

⁷ “North Atlantic Treaty,” April 4, 1949, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_17120.htm (accessed September 21, 2016).

⁸ NATO, “The Consultation Process and Article 4,” NATO http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49187.htm (accessed September 21, 2016).

⁹ Oguzlu, “Convergence or Divergence Within the Alliance?” 217.

¹⁰ Resolute Support, “Key Facts and Figures,” NATO, December 2016, <http://www.rs.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php> (accessed December 28, 2016).

to be the lead nation for the NATO Spearhead Force.¹¹ Turkey continues to make significant military contributions to NATO, an action which indicates its desire to work within the alliance to achieve its interests.¹²

All of these examples are clear indicators that Turkey intends to be a full participant in the alliance. Its actions illustrate a continued interest in working with NATO, not a desire to undermine it or break away from it. Turkey simply desires a greater recognition of and latitude to wield its regional influence, while still being able to rely upon NATO for security-related issues. In short, it seeks to take full advantage of the benefits provided by alliance membership.

¹¹ Sevil Erkus, "Turkey Will Lead NATO Spearhead Force in 2021," *Atlantic Council*, May 14, 2015, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/turkey-will-lead-nato-spearhead-force-in-2021> (accessed February 11, 2017).

¹² Oguzlu, "Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status," 789-790.

Conclusion

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is a ruler unlike any other that Turkey has had since the founding of the republic. He has intentionally differentiated himself from the original “Father Turk” and other Turkish leaders, and in many ways appears to want to be the new father of Turkey.¹ Where Atatürk eschewed global ambitions, Erdoğan has become more globally engaged; where previous leaders have historically refused to consider any concessions for the Kurds, Erdoğan has been open to many of their demands; where prior administrations were content to let the US and the European powers determine NATO’s course, Ankara now desires more input into the decision-making process in Brussels. All of these are examples of the way that any rising power would be expected to behave, but because they are historically out of character for the Turkish nation, its allies have had difficulty interpreting what these actions mean. As a result, questions such as the ones presented in the opening of this paper have arisen. Is Turkey turning from the West? Is Turkey still a viable member of NATO? What can be done to bridge the seemingly widening gap between Turkey and NATO? This concluding section will answer these questions using the analysis presented in the previous sections.

Turkey’s economic and democratic development have provided it greater influence than at any other time in the republic’s history. Its approach to foreign policy is summarized in its statement of “Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors:”

Today, being aware of her increasing tools and capabilities, and the responsibilities emanating from these, Turkey pursues a multi-dimensional foreign policy which is pre-emptive rather than being reactive. In other words,

¹ Halil Karaveli, “Erdoğan’s Journey,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 6 (November/December 2016): 130.

Turkey steers developments by *taking initiatives* rather than merely watching them unfold and determine a stance accordingly. (emphasis added) ²

It is this idea of Turkey taking initiative that is specifically ahistorical. It now seeks the autonomy afforded other powerful NATO member nations – namely the recognition that although it is a member of NATO, it is not identified strictly by this membership. It is a nation that has power, responsibility, and authority apart from its NATO membership – a true “multi-dimensional foreign policy.”³ Where appropriate, it seeks the latitude to exercise this power, responsibility, and authority without undue influence from other nations, allies or otherwise.

This fact addresses the first question from the introduction: Is Turkey turning away from the West? Clearly the answer is no. Turkey has increased its level of engagement with non- Western nations, but the idea of an East/West binary is a simplistic reduction of modern-day Turkey’s identity. The use of such alarmist rhetoric only serves to antagonize Turkey.⁴ The fact is that no rising power can afford to lock itself into a one-dimensional foreign policy that engages only one region of the world to the exclusion of all others. Turkey’s increasingly open stance towards the East does not translate into a turn away from the West. It remains strongly linked to the West in areas of security, commerce, and trade. To view the situation as a choice between East and West neglects the strong nationalistic character of Turkish identity that Atatürk worked tirelessly to instill in the population. This nationalism supersedes any desire Turkey has to be associated with the West or NATO.⁵

² Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Policy of Zero Problems with Our Neighbors,” Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/policy-of-zero-problems-with-our-neighbors.en.mfa> (accessed October 21, 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mustafa Kibaroglu and Selim C. Sazak, “Business As Usual: The U.S.-Turkey Security Partnership,” *Middle East Policy* Vol. 22 No. 4, (Winter 2015), 98.

⁵ Katerina Dalacoura, “Muslim and Modern,” *Juncture* Vol. 21, No. 4 (Spring 2015): 325.

The answer to the first question leads directly to the answer to the second question: Does Turkey remain a viable member of NATO? Here, the answer is yes. Turkey remains as engaged in alliance activities as any other member nation, perhaps even more so. When recent dissension between NATO and Turkey has arisen, it has been in areas where Turkey has not previously asserted itself but has now chosen to exert influence. An example is Turkey's objection to the nominee put forth by the traditional Western powers for NATO Secretary General. The umbrage taken by the West at Turkey's objection to Rasmussen is reflective of an organization that has only twice in 65 years had a leader from further east than Denmark, and those two instances were from Germany and Italy. NATO is unaccustomed to the type of strong input that a non-traditional NATO power broker such as Turkey has presented in the last decade-and-a-half, and the Western leaders have not responded well to it. However, the fact that Turkey is pursuing a greater role is indicative of the value they place in the alliance. Its actions are demonstrative not of a nation that seeks to undermine or disrupt the alliance, but that of a nation that seeks to work within the confines of a security organization in which it finds great value and worth.⁶

This all leads to the third and perhaps most important question: What can be done to bridge the seemingly widening gap between Turkey and NATO? It is in this area that NATO leaders must understand the evolution of Turkey's national identity. Just as NATO's identity has evolved since the end of the Cold War, and again after September 11, so too has Turkey's. It has become more active in its foreign policy, and it has begun using soft power in the form of cultural, diplomatic, and economic influence in lieu of its traditional reliance

⁶ Tarik Oğuzlu, "Making Sense of Turkey's Rising Power Status: What Does Turkey's Approach Within NATO Tell Us?" *Turkish Studies* Vol. 14 No. 4 (December 2013): 790-791.

on hard power. Being a member of the alliance means that a part of Turkey's more active foreign policy is executed through its NATO membership.

The first and most important step for NATO leaders then is to acknowledge and be more receptive of Turkey's increased influence. Erdoğan and others in Ankara have very clearly stated their position that Turkey has a greater responsibility than it has in the past not just to *act*, but to *lead* in world affairs. It has backed up these statements with very tangible examples of its ability to do so. It has shown the ability to mediate between its neighbors, such as in the situation between Iraq and Syria in 2010. Erdoğan has made strong efforts to recast traditionally ill-disposed relationships with both Syria and the Kurds. NATO should acknowledge these efforts and allow Turkey to carry out its foreign policy, even if it may involve interaction with nations with which NATO may not have good relations. Just as traditional Western powers such as Germany and France maintain a degree of economic cooperation with nations such as Russia, NATO should extend the same respect to Turkey.

NATO must also realize that Turkey's increased influence will not be limited to its bilateral interaction with other nations. Part of Turkey's foreign policy is its membership in NATO, and it intends to ensure that Turkish national interests are considered when NATO makes a decision. It has shown this in decisions ranging from the operational to the administrative. In short, NATO should not assume that Turkey will automatically go along with whatever the traditional leaders propose. Instead, NATO must demonstrate an awareness of how certain alliance decisions may affect Turkey's national interests and work with Turkey to gain its support.

Regarding Turkey's national interests, NATO must better understand that Turkey's unique security environment means that its interests and those of NATO may not always

perfectly align. When this occurs, Western leaders must not make the cognitive leap that Turkey's pursuit of its own interests is an attempt to subvert those of NATO's. Instead, NATO and Turkey must work together to balance Turkey's unique security challenges with the broader interests of the alliance.⁷

This does not mean that the burden of maintaining and strengthening the relationship falls entirely on NATO's shoulders. In any relationship, both parties must work together and Turkey has a significant role to play in bridging the gap. As a member of the alliance, Turkey has responsibilities and obligations that it must fulfill if it desires acknowledgement of its authority to lead. Among these is the responsibility to act in adherence with Western democratic norms. If Turkey believes that "the level reached by Turkey in the field of ... democracy has broadened her foreign policy outreach and increased her power of impact in this domain," then it must not regress in this area.⁸ Erdoğan's authoritarian style of governance is not congruent with its self-observation of having increased levels of democracy. He should not expect Western leaders to blithely accept his speech and actions as if they do not reflect at all upon NATO.

Erdoğan's measures following the attempted coup in 2016 distanced him even further from Western leaders. His decisions to arrest potential conspirators en masse with little or no evidence and to allegedly torture dissidents are antithetical to democratic values and will only serve to delegitimize him in the eyes of his peers in Brussels. When Erdoğan fails to comport himself in accordance with democratic norms, NATO leaders must not shy away from stern public admonishment, or more severe actions as the situation may dictate. His

⁷ Kibaroglu and Sazak, 98.

⁸ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

actions should directly influence the degree to which Brussels is willing to work with him. Alliance credibility demands as much.

Additionally, Turkey must recognize that when NATO nations pursue their individual interests, they will not always align with Turkey's interests. This is particularly true regarding counter-ISIL operations, coordination with Syrian Kurds, and interactions with Iraq, Syria, Russia, and others in Turkey's neighborhood. NATO has its own security interests in the region, and Ankara must grant NATO leaders the same leeway that it expects in pursuit of its own national interests.

The interests that brought Turkey and NATO together over 60 years ago have developed and matured over that time. They have taken on a new and different dynamic, and new interests have emerged. Neither Turkey nor NATO is the same as they were in 1952, 1992, or even 2002. As their identities have evolved, so too has their relationship. But in spite of these changes, the underlying common interests remain. The evolution of the relationship requires that each entity engage each other with an acknowledgement of both the changes and the enduring commonalities. This is a relationship that continues to be of value to both Turkey and NATO, and it is not likely to come to an end because of the challenges and disagreements of the last several years. However, if both sides are to take full advantage of their affiliation with each other, then they must be able to support each other where their interests most closely align, while giving each other space to operate in areas where individual national or organizational interests may take respective precedence. It is this type of mutual respect and understanding that forms the foundation of the most effective and enduring relationships, and it will serve to strengthen the connection that has kept them together over the previous seven decades.

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